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Transnationalism in Surinam: Brazilian Migrants in Paramaribo

Marjo de Theije

A NEW COMMUNITY IN PARAMARIBO¹

A new flow of migrants is rapidly changing the population of the Guianas. In less than a decade, Brazilians have become a significant group in Surinam, a country with, according to the latest census, a total population of only 487,024 inhabitants (Censuskantoor 2005).¹ It is estimated that between 15,000 and 40,000 Brazilians have found a home in the country, mostly since 1995. The large majority of these migrants came to prospect for gold in the forest, but increasing numbers now live in Paramaribo (the capital), where a part of the Tourtonne neighborhood is now known as Belenzinho—which is a diminutive form of Belém, the capital of the state of Pará in the north of Brazil and the hometown of many of the new inhabitants.

The influx of Brazilian migrants is also considerable in the bordering Guianas, although exact numbers are lacking. While the contacts between the Guianas and Brazil are not entirely new, the scale of this influx of Brazilians is unprecedented. This recent migration has added to the already ethnically plural population of the three Guianas. In Surinam, for example, the Brazilians have to make a place for themselves among Hindus (East Indian, 37%), Afro-Surinamese (31%), Javanese (15%), five Amerindian peoples (totaling 3%), Chinese (2%) and Europeans (1%) (Baines 2003:10).² As several migrants mentioned during our conversations: “We think Brazil has a great variety of ethnic groups, but in Surinam there are many more different peoples.”

Here I shall address some of the implications of the insertion of these Brazilians into Surinamese society, by considering the development of the new community in the country and paying special attention to the transnational resources the Brazilians use to build their lives in Surinamese society. My focus is the social

and cultural dynamics of community construction in Paramaribo, which is where I carried out most of my research.

First, I shall review the history of the migration of Brazilians. In this, I shall discuss the permeability of national borders in the region, and identify the typical forms of this recent stream of migrants. Who are these migrants, and why do they migrate to Surinam? Second, I shall look at the transnational resources that are important in the construction of the lives of these migrants. I shall pay attention to language, economy, family life, and religion. In all these domains, I shall consider both concrete links with Brazil and the role of an ideological identification with Brazil, in order to show how ideas of temporality predominate and underscore the logic and importance of maintaining strong links with Brazil and Brazilians. I shall conclude with some considerations on the concept of transnationality in the light of this case study.

BRAZILIAN MIGRANTS IN SURINAM

Movements between Brazil and Surinam

Contacts between Brazil and Surinam have a long and, so far, unwritten history. Although the border between the countries lies in the inaccessible heartlands of the Amazon jungle—an area with a very low population density—there have always been contacts, if not directly then through the territories of neighboring Guyana and French Guiana. Several older Surinamese told me that, in the 1940s and 1950s, many Surinamese crossed the border to work in Brazil. Later on it became common for middle-class Surinamese to go to Belém for shopping or as tourists. More recently, intermarriage has brought many Brazilians to Surinam, as a result of contacts established while working for international enterprises or studying in Brazil.³ It is reported that the first Brazilians to work in Paramaribo were fishermen, who had sailed up the coast from the Amazon basin. For several decades, Brazilian women came to the country to work as prostitutes, and small numbers of Brazilian men arrived to prospect for gold. However, the number of Brazilians present in the country remained modest and largely unnoticed until at least 1985, when their number started to grow considerably as a result of the influx of *garimpeiros* (small-scale independent gold miners), who at first established themselves only in the interior, but from 1995 increasingly also in Paramaribo. Most people consider 1997/1998 as the starting point for the formation of the Brazilian community in Paramaribo. This is when supermarkets first started to sell Brazilian products, and the Brazilians themselves opened shops selling equipment for mining activities, bars where the *garimpeiros* could drink, and hostels where they could stay while in the city.

Since 1985, an estimated two million Brazilians have left their country. This is a reversal for a country that was built by immigrants. The Portuguese were the

first to arrive, but already in the first decades of colonization other European nationals and large numbers of African slaves followed. In the 19th century, new groups entered the country. Most came from Europe (Spain, Italy and Germany), but the Arab world and Japan were also represented. This influx started to decline in the 1930s, but lost significance only in around 1960.

Throughout its history, Brazil has also witnessed intense internal migration, first from the coastal zones to the interior—to the frontiers—and later from the north-eastern countryside to the industrial urban areas of the southeast. Millions of Brazilians moved in the 20th century, but most remained within the borders of the nation. It was only during the economic crisis of the 1980s that large numbers of Brazilians started to leave the country. In the 1990s, more than one million Brazilians were living abroad, mainly in the USA, Japan and Paraguay.⁴ At its southern borders, the movement of people between Brazil and its neighboring countries is quite stable, with in recent decades Argentina both receiving and sending most migrants (Hasenbalg & Frigerio, 1999).

The transborder movement in the Amazon region is much more difficult to assess. This is because the flow is relatively invisible, as it comprises peasants, manual workers, and—in the case of Surinam—*garimpeiros*. From the 1980s onward, tens of thousands of Brazilians migrated to French Guiana to make a living at the construction works related to the Kourou space centre (Arouck, 2000, 2002). Thirty percent of the population of Guiana (projected population in 2005: 195,506)⁵ is now Brazilian. In Surinam's other neighboring country—Guyana—Brazilians are active in diamond mining in numbers similar to those in Surinam.⁶ Most of them are poor, unschooled laborers, who travel overland in search of opportunities and without concrete plans with respect to their near future. Many arrive in Surinam illegally, by crossing the Maroni river (which forms the frontier with French Guiana) or arriving with a tourist visa (see article by Hoogbergen & Kruijt, this volume).⁷ For them, the border between the countries is nothing more than an administrative obstacle. Because the Surinamese authorities have not provided a procedure that could facilitate the regularization of the status of the new migrants, the large majority of the Brazilians are in the country illegally, which is another aspect of the invisibility of this migration stream.

Profile of the Migrants

In the last decade, the typical Brazilian migrant in Surinam is an unschooled laborer hoping to make some quick money. Most come from the state of Maranhão or Pará, although I also met Brazilians from the south of the country, namely from Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, or—from further south—Santa Catarina or Rio Grande do Sul. Most of them are young men without a family. For example, Waldemiro was 19 when he arrived in Surinam for the first time. He had left his parents at the age of 17 to work at the hydroelectric power plant in Xingu,

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in the state of Pará, but had decided that the salary was not worth the effort. Two years later, he became a *garimpeiro* in Surinam. Unfortunately, the gold did not bring him the instant wealth he had hoped for, so he still had to work hard to earn his living. He had returned to see his parents only once during the four years he had been working in the goldmines of Surinam. Most of the older Brazilian men have a family, but have left their wife and children at home to go off to try and earn money. These men are more likely to travel to Brazil once a year or so, although after some time, a few find a new partner in Surinam and start a new family in the forests of Paramaribo. Others reunite their family after some years by fetching their wife, although they often leave their children with relatives in Brazil.

It is not uncommon for women to come alone, too. In Brazil, many women are the sole providers for their families, and they too see an opportunity in working in the gold business for some years. The story of Eliene is a good example. Eliene was born in the interior of Maranhão, where she had her first child at the age of 15. She is now 31 and has six children (the youngest is only seven), whom she is raising on her own as she left her husband five years ago. When she found herself unable to earn money in the small Brazilian town in which she lived, she left her children with her family (three with her mother and three with a sister) and left for São Paulo to find work. However, as an unschooled woman she could not find a rewarding job, so within a year she moved to the town of Boa Vista, where her sister lives. There, she worked for a few months as a domestic servant, but again the wages were not enough to support her family. She therefore decided to start work at a *garimpo* (a small, informal mine). She worked for two and a half years as a cook for a team of *garimpeiros*, and used the money she was able to save to buy her own mining equipment. She then set up her own small *barranco* (an artisanal mining pit), where she now works and lives with four miners and a cook. When I met her, she had been working there for a year, and thought that one more year would furnish her with enough money to return to Brazil and reunite her family, build a house, and start a small business to provide for her children. Women also come to Surinam to work as prostitutes, mostly in town but increasingly also in the forest.⁸

The above is typical of recent migrants; that is, they hold the idea that they will work for a few years and then be able to return to Brazil, where they will build their own house and start a small business to support their family. However, many make a career of it, leaving periodically in the hope of making big money. Take Francisco, for example, a man I met on the plane from Georgetown to Paramaribo. He was on his way back home, because he missed his wife and young children so much. His oldest son had stayed at the mine, however. Although Francisco was going home and had no concrete plans to return—he said he was getting too old for the harsh life in the forest—he did not reject the possibility of returning soon. He, too, comes from the interior of Maranhão, where there are few

opportunities to earn real money. He told me that: "You know, we work the land, and that's very tedious; and the prospect of earning big money in the *garimpo* is attractive." He had left his family to prospect for gold many times before.

Like Francisco, many other *garimpeiros* have worked in the gold business before, sometimes for only short periods though sometimes for decades, in other places in Brazil, Guyana, or French Guiana. Several of the workers I talked to had started their career in Serra Pelada—the famous goldmine in Pará to which some 25,000 men flocked during the gold rush of the early 1980s.⁹ Others had only recently heard the news and had decided to take the step into the unknown.

For all these *garimpeiros*, coming to Surinam is—at least initially—a temporary measure: They want to earn money and they see more opportunities in Surinam than in Brazil, but intend to return to their home country. This image is confirmed in studies of other Brazilian migrations, especially in the United States.¹⁰ Several researchers have observed that most Brazilian migrants say that they do not plan to stay and do not consider themselves as migrants who have come to stay. This is said to be the main reason why they do not try to integrate themselves into US society (Margolis, 1998). These migrants tend to invest much more in maintaining links with Brazil than in making new contacts in the society of settlement—a point to which I shall return in more detail.

Migration to Illegality

The relative invisibility of the Brazilian migrants in Surinam can also be understood from the viewpoint of legal regulation. Undocumented migration has received little attention in qualitative research, even though it affects the everyday life of many migrants. The Brazilians in Surinam are subject to the same lack of security that many migrants worldwide have to deal with, as they suffer from the legal consequences of moving from one country to another without the necessary documents. Migrants without documents are invisible to statisticians and to nation-states, and they are vulnerable to malefactors, such as criminals and corrupt police, which puts them in a position as citizens without rights.¹¹ Sometimes the police raid pensions and brothels to check documents and look for money. Apart from this legal insecurity, in the *garimpos* the Brazilians suffer from a lack of justice because of the conflicts over the ownership of the gold with the Maroons, who have the rights over the land (Heemskerk, 2003; Hoogbergen et al., 2001). As a result, many Brazilians in Surinam live in constant fear of the police and of being deported, and this too makes them avoid contact with the authorities. According to the Brazilian consulate in Paramaribo, very few Brazilian migrants register there as a result of the supposed character of the *garimpeiros* ("They're like nomads," the vice-consul told me in 2004¹²), and because they have other problems to deal with and thus no time to worry about their legal rights and documents. Many of the Brazilians in the Guianas are constantly on the move and might "forget" about the paperwork.

Previously, Brazilian workers in Surinam could buy a work permit (“blue card”) for USD 200; it was valid for a year and could be renewed. It gave them the right to work in the country and to run a business. However, the government of President Ronald Venetiaan, which has been in power since 2000, abandoned this policy and has not replaced it by any other regulation. Now, migrants receive only a visa upon their arrival, and it is renewable only by leaving the country and re-entering, which is not always feasible (cf. Tuinfort, 2004). When Venetiaan and eight of his government ministers visited the Brazilian leader Luis Ignácio da Silva in July 2003, the “problem” of the Brazilians living in Surinam was an important topic on the agenda (BRON). Only at the end of 2004 was an agreement finally reached concerning the legalization of these Brazilians. Another brief visit to Surinam by the Brazilian president in February 2005 was interpreted by the Brazilians in the country as the final step toward the introduction of a legalization process.¹³ However, the Surinamese parliament still has to approve the new law and some fear that, with elections due to be held in May 2005, the agreement will end up in a drawer in some obscure Surinamese ministry.

Notwithstanding their legal insecurity, this lack of state control (the “void state;” Hoogbergen & Kruijt, this volume) does not prevent the Brazilians from living and working in the country, and in practice the Brazilians in Surinam are becoming an increasingly noticeable group. I shall now discuss the presence of Brazilians in Paramaribo through an analysis of the characteristic features of the community-building process that is taking place there.

Transnational Community-building

There are many Brazilian elements in the urban landscape of Paramaribo, for example the houses of the *Compra de Ouro* (gold buyers) and the many shops selling utensils for the Brazilians’ mining activities. One of these shops—Casa Brazil (“Brazil House”)—proudly claims, in a hybrid of Portuguese and Dutch, that it has *alles voor de gouddelving* (“everything for gold mining”). There are also Brazilian bakeries, Brazilian launderettes, Brazilian beauty shops, and so on. Downtown one can find the Bacana restaurant, and just around the corner from it is a row of three bar/restaurants, two of which are the “Bar de Aldira” and the “Coqueiro verde” (“Green coconut tree”). In and nearby Belenzinho, there are several Brazilian supermarkets—such as the Supermercado Transamerica (*fazendo o melhor para você*—“Doing the best for you”)—and many hotels where gold prospectors stay while they are in the city. Brazilian flags are everywhere.¹⁴ The very existence of this neighborhood in Paramaribo suggests that the Brazilian community has a degree of stability, and indicates the fact that the new inhabitants of Paramaribo stick together in one particular area of the urban space. Is it possible to call this a “transnational” community and, if so, what are its transnational characteristics?

Language Language is an important factor in the orientation of the migrants toward Brazil and the other Brazilians in Surinam. Over twenty languages are spoken in Surinam.¹⁵ Dutch is the official language of the government, commerce, and schools, which sets the country apart from the rest of Latin America. The other languages are Sarnami—which is spoken by the people of Indian descent—Javanese, and many different Afro-Surinamese and Amerindian languages. The lingua franca, however, is Sranantongo (“Surinamese tongue”), a creole of English and Dutch, the grammar of which largely derives from the languages slaves brought with them from Africa. For the Portuguese-speaking Brazilians, these Surinamese languages pose a problem, which is an important reason for them to limit their contacts with the Surinamese. Those who stay longer eventually learn Sranantongo (which most Brazilians call Taki-taki), although their command of the language often remains very limited. I once shared a taxi with a Brazilian man who had lived in Surinam since 1995, but who was unable to tell the driver (a young boy who did not speak Portuguese) where he wanted to go. Part of the explanation might be the fact that most Brazilians have little schooling and no propensity for studying other languages. Some, however, said that they see no point in learning Dutch, since so few people speak it, and that they were learning English instead. For most, however, not speaking the local languages was not a question of choice, but a consequence of their poor schooling. In the meantime, the day-to-day Sranantongo they picked up in the forest and on the streets of Paramaribo was sufficient to get by in Surinam.

According to the Brazilians, the Surinamese find it much easier than they do to learn Portuguese, because the latter are used to handling several different languages. The higher level of schooling of the Surinamese might be an additional factor. Many younger people studied English and Spanish at school, and therefore speak these languages in addition to the many other languages spoken in the country. A lot of the Surinamese speak Portuguese because they have intensive contacts with Brazilians, for example because they work in a shop or drive a taxi. The *Centro de Estudos Brasileiros in Paramaribo*—a Brazilian institution for the propagation of Brazilian culture, which was founded in 1983 and is linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and offers language classes to the Surinamese population—told me that the demand for their courses increases each year, and that the profile of students changed along with the changing contacts of the Surinamese with Brazil and the Brazilians. To begin with, the Center’s clients were businessmen and students who were preparing to go to Brazil, but now also many Surinamese housewives who want to be able to communicate with their Brazilian neighbors are studying there.¹⁶

For the Brazilian migrants, their limited ability to communicate with the local population creates obstacles in everyday life, although many seem to have found practical solutions to this. To handle bureaucratic problems, they can count on formal and informal middlemen, both Surinamese and Brazilian (I shall deal

with the role of these people below). It also helps that they live in a neighborhood in which quite a few services and shops are run by Portuguese speakers. One of the supermarkets has a billboard that declares: “*Supermercado Li-A-Ming trading. O que você precise encontra [sic] aqui*” (“Li-A-Ming Trading Supermarket. Whatever you need, you’ll find it here”). Although all the butcher’s shops in this part of town are Surinamese, they have been transformed in recent years into a paradise for non-Dutch speaking Brazilian meat-eaters, as the butchers are now bilingual.

On the personal level, socializing is managed one way or another, with hands and feet, with neighbors, landlords, Surinamese members of their church, etc. Furthermore, the developments point to changes, as the number of mixed marriages is increasing, children go to school where classes are taught in Dutch, and Brazilians have become involved in Surinamese networks. This will certainly help them to learn to speak either Dutch or better Sranantongo. It is significant that recently a campaign to open a school for Brazilian children living in Paramaribo took off, and that others are trying to organize extra classes for Brazilian children in Portuguese. In the streets one can see signs of linguistic integration, for example: “Sheks promotion proudly presents *De grootste Braziliaanse show ooit in Suriname: Calcinha Preta*” (“Shek’s Promotions proudly presents the greatest Brazilian show ever in Surinam: Black Slip”)—which is a new form of Surinamese, namely Dutch mixed with English and Brazilian.

Middlemen In their day-to-day lives, the Brazilians are being drawn into the Brazilian community in Paramaribo. The migrants’ knowledge of Surinam is very limited, and because of the language problem and their lack of experience in dealing with other cultural settings, it is hard for them to find out how things work. However, this problem was much more serious ten years ago: All my interviewees who had arrived in Surinam before 1998 told me that they had had problems finding their way in their host society. However, they had found help in two forms: their fellow countrymen, and the local taxi drivers.

At the airport of Belém, I met three Brazilians who were on their way to Paramaribo; for two of them, it was their first time. They had met each other just the day before, when they were arranging their trip, and now they were traveling together—by plane for the first time in their lives. They had no firm idea of where they would go or what kind of work they would find; they had heard about opportunities to earn money in Surinam and had simply decided to take a chance.¹⁷ As they say, “In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,” and the third man—who had been to Surinam before—had become the guide for the other two (he was not that experienced, but he at least knew how to take a taxi from the airport to Paramaribo and how to find a hotel). They were not well informed about the immigration regulations and did not know what to write on the immigration form. It is my impression that many migrants arrive this way, relying on compatriots who have more experience—and on a measure of good luck.

Surinamese taxi drivers were thus among the first to work with the Brazilians. They soon learnt Portuguese and specialized in everything the *garimpeiros* needed, ranging from pieces for the machines used in gold prospecting, through anti-malaria drugs and tickets to Brazil, to selling gold, buying clothes, and visiting the supermarket for supplies to keep a workforce in the forest fed for a few months. When a *garimpeiro* emerges from the forest to visit Paramaribo, he does not want to spend much time in town (a day without work is a day without earnings), and so hires a taxi for a day or two to take him to all the places in town he needs to visit. This is good business for the taxi drivers, because the *garimpeiros* have little idea of prices and pay in gold. Furthermore, a system has developed whereby the local shop owners give the taxi drivers a commission based on how much the Brazilians spend. Jermain, a taxi driver in his early 30s, told me that it was big business a few years ago; he built a house with the money he earned transporting Brazilians around town. Surinamese taxi drivers are still important, although the Brazilians have become less dependent on them, as more options have become available since the opening of specialized shops run by Brazilians or Portuguese-speaking Surinamese. Over the years, the migrants have become more aware of the value of goods and services, and some have even become taxi drivers in Paramaribo. However, the Brazilians are still important clients of the local taxi companies, partly because the Brazilians who live in town use taxis more than the Surinamese do.

Apart from their fellow *garimpeiros* and the local taxi drivers, Brazilians could count on some other support in Paramaribo, although usually they would turn to these only in emergencies. Sister Judith—a Surinamese nun who lived for many years in Brazil and speaks fluent Portuguese—is one of the persons who often serve as an interpreter and who provide advice to many of the Brazilian women in town. This kind of informal help is also provided by individuals who, for some reason or other, have become involved with the Brazilians in Surinam. One such person is Núbia, a Brazilian woman who married a Surinamese man almost 20 years ago. After her taxi-driver husband brought home a *garimpeiro* who had no money and needed a place to stay, she opened her house to other *garimpeiros* who were in town for a few days. For years, sometimes as many as 15 men at a time would be sleeping in their spare room or on the living-room floor. It was one large family, she told me, as she also cooked for them and they played with her children.

Over the course of the years, more professional middlemen appeared, such as the gold-buying companies that help the *garimpeiros* to send their money back to Brazil. A case in point is the *Cooperativa dos Garimpeiros Brasileiros no Suriname*, which—contrary to what its name suggests—is not a cooperative but a kind of central service point for Brazilians in Surinam. It offers advice and various facilities, as well as medical aid and equipment for gold mining. Another important source of help for Brazilians who do not know their way around the bureaucracy

of Surinam, is the office of the airline company META, which maintains direct air connections with Boa Vista, Georgetown, and Belém. Here, Brazilians not only buy tickets but also find out about the vaccinations they need to re-enter Brazil, the stamps they need in their passport to leave the country, and whether they will be allowed back into Surinam. Another professionalized service for Brazilians is provided by people who specialize in sending parcels to and fro, and know the prices of machines and equipment in both Brazil and Surinam. These people are active not only in Surinam, but also in Belém. Those in Brazil provide help with respect to getting passports, buying tickets, etc.

I have so far omitted to mention two actors that one would expect to find playing a role here, namely the churches—which do not act so much as mediators in terms of offering specific services to the migrants in Paramaribo (as I shall explain in more detail below)—and the Brazilian embassy, which fulfils no role in receiving Brazilians or providing services other than the strict consular ones. In 1995, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs founded the Program for Support to Brazilians in Foreign Countries (Ribeiro, 1999:67); however, the embassy in Paramaribo has not developed any activities that address the specific needs of the migrants in Surinam. Finally, the middle-class Brazilians who arrived in the 1980s and early 1990s (i.e., before the boom of the *garimpeiros*) did not get involved with their newly-arrived fellow Brazilians until recently. But now they have started mobilizing, and several women are involved in the preparation of the proposal for a Brazilian school in Paramaribo.

In sum, all these middlemen (and “middlewomen”) play crucial roles in the way the Brazilian migrants manage to organize a life in Paramaribo. With the exception of the taxi drivers, they themselves are Brazilians and thus reinforce the linkage with Brazil and Brazilian culture.

Socializing For the first Brazilian migrants, there was no “Brazilianized” infrastructure in Paramaribo. They encountered mistrust from the Surinamese, and especially women had to deal with certain prejudices. One young woman told me that she used to be afraid to leave her house, because people would assume that she was a prostitute and treat her accordingly. Others said that the locals still treat all Brazilians as “ignorant *garimpeiros*.” I heard many different opinions about the Brazilians from Surinamese people. Some mentioned the increasing violence in the country, and others that “They take away our gold” and “Don’t even bother to speak our language,” although most said that Brazilians work hard and do the type of work “we Surinamese don’t want to do,” and that they are honest people and “know how to party.” According to many Surinamese and Brazilians, the presence of the Brazilian migrants is changing Surinam considerably, not only in the forest where the *garimpeiros* work and live, but also in Paramaribo.

What exactly has changed in Paramaribo? For a start, there are the Brazilian shops, which sell all kinds of products imported from Brazil, such as food and clothes. Especially the clothes are bought not only by the Brazilians, but also by

the Surinamese. Brazilian shoes, for example, are good quality and not expensive. These products are now available not only in the Brazilian shops in Belenzinho, but also in the centre of town. In March 2005, Kirpalani—one of the traditional department stores in Paramaribo—had a large sign above its display window announcing the arrival of a large collection of Brazilian shoes. With respect to food-stuffs, the Surinamese seem less inclined to adopt Brazilian customs, just as the Brazilians cling to their own diet. But Brazilian rum (*cachaça*), which is used to make *caipirinha* (a cocktail), is bought by Brazilians and Surinamese alike. One can also find it in supermarkets outside the area where the Brazilians live. In this respect, the Brazilians seem to be more attached to their nationally produced drinks: They buy a Brazilian brand of beer to drink at home, instead of the local one (even though it is cheaper).

Another realm of social life in which there is a large Brazilian influence, is that of nightlife and entertainment. Although there are nightclubs and bordellos in which Brazilian prostitutes work, these are not the places the migrants frequent. But the small bars and restaurants run by Brazilians are now no longer situated only in Belenzinho. To the contrary, there is a concentration of Brazilian places developing near Paramaribo's traditional entertainment area. There is live music every Saturday and Sunday, and the food and drinks are Brazilian, as are the customers. Here, the migrants create a piece of Brazil in Surinam. But Brazilian entertainment is also consumed by the Surinamese and the tourists, since most of the bands are Brazilian and the occasional parties and shows also feature Brazilian artists. Since 2001, Paramaribo has had an annual carnival parade; in 2004, the first Surinamese *bloco* (carnival group) participated in it.

Many Brazilians in Surinam live permanently in a hotel, alone or with a roommate (and in the case of women, with their children). Living in a hotel is relatively cheap and easy to arrange, especially if you do not plan to stay long, are still looking for a good job, or—obviously—do not have the money to rent a house. Those who have a more stable position and a job in town, usually rent a house to share with five or six fellow Brazilians; such a home often becomes a place where family members or *garimpeiro* friends can stay while they are in town. Some of the people who live in the forest also have a house in Paramaribo, as a kind of operating base to which they can always return when they are sick with malaria, for example. In all these cases, the “home” in Paramaribo has an aura of temporality, and people do not invest much in their home, apart from buying a television set and parabolic antenna to receive Brazilian broadcasting. The information these migrants receive about what is happening in the world is mediated by Brazilian television canals, which reinforces their identification with Brazil. Some Surinamese radio stations broadcast a weekly program hosted by Brazilian presenters and aimed at the Brazilian population. Other media have little access to this community.¹⁸ Most migrants preserve their links with Brazil by sending money back home and keeping in contact via their mobile telephone; thus, their dominant socio-cultural

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end economic ties are with Brazil rather than Surinam. This means that they engage in a transnational but predominantly Brazilian network.

Notwithstanding this dominant orientation toward Brazil and Brazilian culture, many migrants want to stay in Surinam permanently, because they appreciate the calm atmosphere, the friendly people, and the low degree of violence in the local society compared to that in Brazil. Families with children are more likely to express this wish, and some middle-class *garimpeiros* have established themselves in Paramaribo with this in mind. It is likely that marriages to local people will increase the number of Brazilians who settle in Paramaribo on a more permanent basis. According to the Brazilian vice-consul, two mixed marriages are registered every week and, of course, many more people live together without registering their relationship.¹⁹

Without doubt, the community-building of the Brazilians depends as much on themselves as it does on the Surinamese society in which they now live. Surinam is a plural society and it is too early to know how the Brazilians will integrate into the societal system. So far, Paramaribo appears to have received the Brazilian immigrants without serious problems. For example, Surinamese football fans support the Brazilian team in the big championships; and Brazilians have the reputation of being hard and serious workers, and they are respected for that. In practice, however, it is not all harmony. Brazilians are associated with drug-trafficking and violence, and this of course creates negative attitudes. As far as official policy is concerned, some measures were recently discussed in parliament, such as the requirement to speak Sranantongo in order to be naturalized (Walterkant, 2003). The Surinamese increasingly consider the Brazilians as rivals for jobs, and they are calling on the government to impose measures to resolve the situation. A negative attitude on the part of the receiving society can have a disturbing influence on the formation of social cohesion.

In the USA, Brazilians become "Latinos;" The host society attributes this generalized identity to them. Beserra (1998; 2003) found that Brazilians in Los Angeles emphasize regional identities, such as the Gaucho identity (from the southern state Rio Grande do Sul).²⁰ In Surinam, the Brazilians refer to their regional background too, for example in the names of their shops and cafés. For the host society, however, there is only one Brazilian identity. The story is that 90% of the Brazilian men in Surinam are from Maranhão, and that 90% of the female migrants are from Pará.²¹ Although these may be two of the most important sending states, it is unlikely that so many migrants come from these parts of Brazil, let alone that there is such a neat distribution by sex. Immigrants need to establish networks and relationships to survive in a new country, and regional and other identities clearly delineate and bring people together; however, in Surinam I did not find any division according to the regional background of the migrants. These Brazilians cherish their Brazilian culture, which they manage to reproduce in the Surinamese context.

Organization The social life of the Brazilians in Surinam is well organized, as shown in the previous section. However, in terms of their political and civil position in society, they remain an unorganized set of individuals. In Paramaribo, there is no association or institution to represent the migrants or to defend their rights. This, according to the people I talked to, is because the Brazilians are “too divided.” But other factors might play a role here, such as the dominant idea of temporality, the orientation toward their home country, and the low level of information and knowledge about Surinamese societal organization.

One notable exception to the absence of Brazilian organizations is the *Cooperativa dos Garimpeiros no Suriname* (Cogasur) mentioned above, which was founded by and is still under the presidency of José Cardoso Neto. When Cardoso, as he is known, arrived in Surinam in 1996 as a gold trader, he saw “that the Brazilians had many problems here” and wanted to do something about it. He founded the cooperative and claims that after some time, 3000 *garimpeiros* had registered, each paying five US dollars a month. According to Brazilian law, *garimpeiros* are only allowed to work as part of a cooperative, and probably Cardoso—who had worked in the gold business in Brazil before coming to Surinam—copied this idea.²² The cooperative in Paramaribo offers social assistance and paid services for the gold workers in Surinam, and defends *garimpeiros* who are in trouble with the police or the tax authorities. Although it is still called a cooperative, people no longer need to register: “Every Brazilian is automatically a member.”²³ This automatic membership, however, leads to a lack of commitment, and people tend to see it more as a service-providing entity than as a representative of their interests. For the outside world, Cardoso nevertheless remains a spokesman for the Brazilian community in Surinam, and every researcher and journalist with an interest in the *garimpeiros* visits the cooperative.²⁴ He is also a contact person for the embassy, and when President Lula visited Surinam in February 2005, Cardoso was invited to speak on behalf of the Brazilians in the country.

As illegal migrants, it is not easy for the Brazilians to organize themselves, because they feel vulnerable in their relation to the Surinamese state. Legalization was the most important topic during the talks Cardoso had with the Brazilian president. From the point of view of the development of a “transnational public sphere” (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003), it is interesting that the migrants turn to the Brazilian authorities to make their claim for citizenship. In their quest for a decent life in Surinam, they resort to the Brazilian state and mobilize their rights, as Brazilian citizens, to security. The social field that the Brazilian migrants create is not limited by geographical boundaries, and the political boundaries that involve the two states become blurred in this process of demanding citizenship in Surinam.

In this respect, the contribution of Olwig (2003) is important. She states that migrants become transnational not only because they maintain a personal connection with their home country, but also because they “are pushed back to the

country they have left by the receiving country because they are categorized and perceived in this country in terms of their origins in another nation-state." This origin marks them as different, and many countries (e.g., the USA, which recognizes dual citizenship) allow them to be active in the political life of two nation-states. "The immigrants, in other words, are perceived to be transnational" (Ollwig, 2003:68). Another realm of organization in which the migrants continue to draw on Brazilian resources is religion.

Religion In Brazil, religion is an important factor in cultural, social, and political life. Throughout the world, religious institutions are considered to be among the most important resources immigrant groups use to adapt to a new setting and to reproduce their identity (cf. Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). The Brazilian population of Surinam is gradually becoming involved in religious activities in their new country, as the Catholic Church is now offering a mass in Portuguese on a regular basis, and some Brazilian evangelical pastors are preaching in the country.

Most Brazilians are Catholics, and although Catholicism is not the dominant religion in Surinam, it does have a significant presence. Every neighborhood in Paramaribo has at least one Catholic church and regular masses. The early migrants would attend the church in Mahonystraat ("Mahony Street"), where mass is held in Spanish. However, for the last four years, they have been able to attend mass in Portuguese, now that there is mission of Brazilian Redemptorist friars in Surinam. Although the country was traditionally under the guidance of Dutch Redemptorists, congregational changes mean that there are fewer Surinamese or Dutch friars present. Although they insist that it is a coincidence that the Brazilian priests came to the country, one of them—Father Vergílio—now acts as a self-appointed spokesman for the Brazilians in the country. The Brazilian priests learned Dutch and Sranantongo and now take care of the parish of Latour (in the south of Paramaribo), an area far from Belenzinho and home to hardly any Brazilians. Every two weeks, however, they organize a mass in Portuguese in the Allerheiligste Verlosser ("Holy Savior") church, in Tourtonne. The mass attracts 30–40 people, and many more on special days like Christmas or Easter.

The Pentecostal pastors did not make the effort to learn Dutch or Sranantongo, and the daily cult is in Portuguese. Although the pastors also claim that their mission to Surinam is not to serve the Brazilian community in particular, in practice they attract mostly Brazilians. In Paramaribo, several churches of the Deus é Amor ("God is Love") Church and of the Assembleia de Deus ("Assembly of God") have Brazilian pastors. Several Brazilians who had been living in Surinam for as long as 15–20 years, and who had initially become members of Surinamese Christian churches—notably the Evangelische Broedergemeente (Moravian church)—are now attending the meetings of the Deus é Amor community. Moreover, several migrants say that they are Catholic and go the Catholic mass in the neighborhood, but also go the Deus é Amor. This mixing of religious styles

is promoted by the fact that there are meetings every day of the week. These people are seeking spiritual comfort, and it feels good to pray and sing in one's own language. According to the pastors, the people come to their church because they have problems. These problems are not specifically related to their position as migrants, but are those that all poor people encounter in Brazil, such as family fights, trouble at work, or a lack of money. They attend church to be cured of these ills, through the power of the Holy Spirit. On weekdays, 20–30 people attend the services in the principal Deus é Amor church on Combélaan (“Combé Lane”), and on Fridays and Sundays this number doubles or triples.

Although Afro-Brazilian religions are also very popular in Brazil, I did not encounter representatives of these in Paramaribo. It would be interesting to know if an interaction between, for example, Candomblé and the Afro-Surinamese Winti takes place and if any new forms of religion emerge. The absence of the Brazilian native religions²⁵ might lead to the suggestion that only globally oriented religions are able to “migrate” along with the migrants. In addition to the fact that religions construct communities among their adherents, offering security connected to both gods and the world of God, and to the “here and now” in the local group, the transnational character of many religions may be attractive to Brazilian migrants in Surinam. More research is needed to analyze these observations in more depth.

From a theoretical perspective, it is important to understand how migration and the transborder activities of the various religious groups have a mutual influence and converge, and what the outcome of this is. It is also of great importance to understand how this has an impact on the social, cultural, economic, and political diversity in the countries of origin and of destination. According to the Surinamese anthropologist, Harold Jap-A-Joe, the growth of Pentecostalism in Surinam is probably related to the arrival of the Brazilians.²⁶ The popularity of the Deus é Amor Church among the Brazilians also attracted the Surinamese population, and created the need to translate the proceedings, so that now there is simultaneous translation into Sranantongo by a Surinamese convert. Thus, religion seems to be one form of migrant activity and organization, although only a small part of the Brazilian community is involved.

CONCLUSION

All over the world, migration is increasingly being used as a strategy to ensure economic survival. In the context of international migration movements, the Brazilians in Surinam differ in at least one way from their fellow migrants who went to the USA, Europe, or Japan: They have gone from one country in the South to another country in the South. Most research refers to migration from

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countries in the South to Europe or the USA. South-South migrations are a complex matter in terms of the structures and the individual situations involved, as well as socially and politically (Lewellen, 2002). The very recent migration of Brazilians to Surinam, Guyana, and French Guiana is therefore an important case for study. We could learn from it how migration leads to the formation of new communities, and more about the role of nation-states, institutions, economic opportunity, individual experiences, and transnationality.

In the research on transnationality, much attention is paid to questions concerning the role of the nation-state, such as the redefinition of the boundaries, political organization, and the sending of remittances. But contemporary migration seems to negate such “facts” as boundaries and borders. It is increasingly understood that the nation-state is no longer the most fitting unity, and that “immigrants become transmigrants by constructing social fields that ignore geographic, political, and cultural boundaries,” thus making the home and the host society a single field for action; they “reconfigure space so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation states” (Margolis, 1995:29). In this context, borders and nations lose their importance for migrants. The Amazon region is such a place where an intense process of international migration and transnational contacts is taking place, as a result of the quest for social and economic security on the part of the inhabitants of the different countries, which overrides the importance of legal frontiers and the role of the nation-states involved. In fact, notwithstanding the legal obstacles, the Guianas seem to have become one social field for the Brazilian *garimpeiros* and other migrants, as people travel and do business relative freely between “France” (as they call French Guiana), Surinam, and Guyana, and the bordering Brazilian states of Roraima and Amapá.

It is a transnational field which, in their experience, offers opportunities that they do not have in the places they originate from, but which in many respects is nothing more than an extension of their homes, albeit with some peculiar characteristics such as a different language and bureaucratic demands. The illegal status with which most of the Brazilians must live, troubles them a lot. Nevertheless, they—with the help of the inefficient states—have found a way to live with it, to do their work, and to live their lives. Although the community they have created in Paramaribo resembles in many ways the communities they have left behind, it is also different because of the Surinamese context and the specific composition of the Brazilian migrant population, that is, a large number of single persons. In most cases, their families live on both sides of the border and the relationship is maintained by phone calls and remittances. Satellite television makes it possible to keep informed about Brazilian news, and to share with those still in Brazil the latest intrigues of the soaps and of the popular program “Big Brother Brazil.”

In the short history of the large Brazilian migration to Surinam, a host of reasons means that most individuals have to pass through a stage of insecurity and instability. This induces new processes of meaning and signification, where issues

of identity, both collective and individual, are articulated with national, ethnic, and religious ideologies, organizations, and practices. I have shown how the Brazilians rely primarily on their fellow migrants, but that over the course of the years they engage in establishing links with Surinamese society in Paramaribo. They also reproduce Brazilian culture through food, sociability, music, and religious activities. Their transnationality appears to be more of a practical nature—fed by an orientation toward their families back home and a minimal amount of communication with the Surinamese—than ideological, since the degree of organization and elaboration of their civil position is very low. What seems to be most important is to obtain a “decent existence” in Paramaribo, as well as stability. This stability may be extended to their families in their home country through remittances. The recent agreement to legalize the Brazilians in Surinam might be the first step toward a new stage in the process of community-building and social cohesion in Paramaribo. Whether the Brazilian migrants in Surinam will “Surinamese” themselves in time is difficult to predict. For now, their orientation toward Brazil, their relatively low social status as manual workers, their language difficulties, and their lack of civil rights, categorizes them first and foremost as Brazilian. For social scientists, their movements show a considerable degree of transnationality.

NOTES

1. The research for this article was carried out during two short fieldtrips, namely in 2004 and 2005. My analysis is based on 80 formal and informal interviews and conversations with migrants, local people, and researchers in Georgetown, Belém, and Paramaribo, as well as on the observations I made during my stays in the three cities. In 2004, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam co-financed the research; in 2005, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) granted a scholarship for the fieldtrip. I thank my colleague Ellen Bal for putting me on the track of this research topic and for introducing me to Surinam.

2. At the time of writing, the results of the 2004 census with respect to ethnicity had not been published.

3. Between 1989 and 1995, some 200 Surinamese students attended university in Brazil, as part of a program of the Surinamese government. The Brazilian government established a program to open places to all South American citizens; the program is still functioning. However, the Surinamese government no longer grants scholarships, as a consequence of which the number of Surinamese students in Brazil has declined drastically.

4. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2004 some 1.5 million Brazilians were living abroad. Loria (1999) states that between 600,000 and one million Brazilians are living in the USA. Major cities with a Brazilian agglomeration are Newark, New York, Miami, Boston, Framingham, Somerville, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Francisco. Beserra (2003:6) mentions that almost 800,000 Brazilians live in the USA, 454,500 in Paraguay, and 224,229 in Japan.

5. See <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/fg.html#People>

6. The total population of Guyana is about 765,000; see <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gy.html#People>

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7. Brazilians can enter Surinam as a tourist without having to apply for a visa beforehand.

8. Although several reports appeared in the media concerning the traffic of women from Brazil to Surinam (and from there to Europe), I found no evidence of women being tempted with offers of work and then being coerced to work in prostitution. All the young women I spoke with were aware that they were going to work as a prostitute when they left Brazil. However, I did not do extensive research on this theme.

9. Some *garimpeiros* who now work in Surinam expect to receive compensation from the Brazilian government for their time of work in Serra Pelada. Government measures have made it difficult for *garimpeiros* to work in Brazil, which is probably one of reasons they now go to the Guianas.

10. The migration of Brazilian citizens is best documented in the case of the USA; see Beserra 1998; Margolis 1994, 1998; Martes 2000; Reis & Sales 1999; Sales 1999.

11. "Illegal" is primarily a juridical term that expresses the relation of the individual to the state. DeGenova (2002) observes that "migrant 'illegality' is a pre-eminently political identity" and the product of immigration laws. "The undocumented have been denied fundamental human rights and many rudimentary entitlements, consigned to an uncertain socio-political predicament, often with little or no resort to any semblance of protection from the law" (2002:439).

12. Personal communication, March 8, 2004.

13. A meeting with the Brazilian community in the country was planned for President Lula's visit. Due to unforeseen circumstances, he had to leave for Brazil before the meeting could take place. This caused great disappointment.

14. Interestingly, the presence of Brazilians in Georgetown is far less evident from signs and flags; for example, the names of hotels are not in Portuguese.

15. There are 20 official languages, but including the languages of recent migrants, there are 22 spoken languages (cf. Mahabier 2004).

16. Personal communication, Director of the CEB, March 10, 2005.

17. The woman told me that "there was this woman in my town who said that you can earn money in Surinam. She was there during Christmastime, but she left again before I could ask for her address."

18. *The Times of Surinam* newspaper publishes a page in Portuguese every week, but it is not a commercial success. Some Brazilians I spoke with knew about it, but did not read it on a regular basis.

19. Personal communication, March 11, 2004.

20. According to Bezerra (1998:27), the preference for regional identities above the national ones "has to do with the diversity of possibilities of being a Brazilian both in Brazil and abroad."

21. See e.g. ADITAL 2003.

22. aw N° 7805, of 18/07/1989.

23. José Cardoso Neto, personal communication, March 6, 2004.

24. I am no exception to this. I interviewed Cardoso twice (in 2004 and 2005) and had several informal conversations with him, as I sometimes ran into him in the restaurant connected to the *co-operativa* or at other "Brazilian" places in town.

25. Although the Deus é Amor Church also has its origins in Brazil, it can be considered part of the global Christian tradition. Furthermore, this church is explicitly a mission church, which is not the case with the different forms of Afro-Brazilian creeds, such as Candomblé and Umbanda.

26. Personal communication, March 9, 2004.

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